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SUBJECT: THE BANGLADESH PARADOX AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: SOME GOOD THINGS ARE HAPPENING

REF: DHAKA 00770

SUMMARY

¶1. The USG is contributing to the development of Bangladesh and finds many outstanding, willing partners. On a recent trip to CoxQs Bazaar and Teknaf in south eastern Bangladesh, the Ambassador and other Embassy officers observed several USAID projects which are helping to modernize energy use, protect precious bio-diversity areas, and train women to build solar power units, among other activities. Despite substantial challenges-- including world-wide increases in the cost of food and fuel, local government inefficiencies and corruption, and the devastation caused by natural disasters-- Bangladesh shows an admirable ability to achieve positive results in the face of adversity.

INAUGURATION OF A BIOGAS PLANT AT THE AL JAMIATUL ISLAMIA DARUS-SUNNA MADRASSAH AT HNILLA, SOUTH OF COXQS BAZAR

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¶2. Southeastern Bangladesh contains some of the last remaining forest and bio-diverse areas in the country. Illegal hunting and rampant tree-cutting for local fuel needs provide two major challenges to the longevity of these nature areas. USAIDQs Nishorgo project, followed this year by its new Integrated Protected Area Co-Management (IPAC) project, focus on conserving biological diversity and building technical capacity for the management of protected areas. One key objective is to reduce dependency on firewood obtained from protected areas.

¶3. At the Al Jamiatul Madrassah, a co-educational residential religious school for more than 700 boys and girls, the Nishorgo project installed a human-waste biogas plant and improved stoves through USAIDQs Nishorgo project. This madrassah, one of many surrounding the Teknaf Nature Reserve that has exclusively used wood from the reserve as fuel, is now taking a leading role in adopting this technology to reduce the exploitation of forest resources, lower operating costs and provide a healthier environment for the students.

¶4. At the madrassah the Ambassador met with cooks and observed the operation of two improved stoves that save an estimated 78 tons of wood fuel annually. Introduction of this technology will save the madrassah 75 percent of its energy costs. Moreover, these steps will save 288 mature trees per year, preventing 50 tons of green house gases from entering into the atmosphere. This will help mitigate the impact of climate change. Through Nishorgo, 878 households near the Teknaf Game Reserve have purchased and are using the environmentally friendly stoves which generate more heat with less fuel. Another 2,859 of these stoves are in use around other environmentally protected areas in the country.

¶5. At the same madrassah, the Ambassador visited a human waste

biogas plant, the first of its kind in the area and the first in a madrassah. The students produce 300 kg. of human waste a day. The biogas plant uses human waste as raw material to produce 425 cubic feet of biogas each day, enough to cook 36,500 kg of rice per year. The madrassah is the first educational institution in the greater Cox's Bazaar area to adopt this improved energy technology. The gas will replace 7.5 tons of fuel wood per year.

INAUGURATION OF A TOURIST WELCOME CENTER AT THE MOCHONI NATURE PARK AT TEKNAF

¶6. The Ambassador inaugurated a community-managed Nature Tourist Center at the Mochoni Nature Park located within the Teknaf Game Reserve south of Cox's Bazaar. Developed with support from the Nishorgo project, the new Mochoni Nature Park has substantial potential for nature tourism, given its lush and mountainous scenery. The Mochoni complex also houses student and staff dormitories. The eco-friendly architecture marks a departure from common local building designs. A new Nishorgo eco-cottage recently opened adjacent to the Mochoni Nature Park, the first of several small lodges designed to encourage local tourism, thus demonstrating the nature reserve is a community asset which should be protected.

¶7. With technical assistance from the Nishorgo project, the Mochoni reserve utilizes a co-management system which brings together representatives from local government, business, NGOs and local community groups to jointly manage issues of common interest in and around the park. This co-management system, implemented around several parks and reserves in the country, has proven to be an effective method of bringing stake-holders interested in all aspects of the parks and its resources together, helping ensure the agreed-upon objectives are sustained.

SOLAR POWER TAPS THE LOCAL SUNSHINE AND TRAINS YOUNG WOMEN IN A NEW HI-TECH ENERGY EFFICIENT RESOURCE

¶8. The Embassy team visited the Grameen Shakti Technology Center in Cox's Bazar. The center is one of twenty established in rural Bangladesh by Grameen Shakti, an affiliate of Grameen Bank, with funding under USAID's Rural Empowerment through Renewable Energy activity. The activity focuses on empowering rural women and youth by training them as technicians in the solar renewable energy sector. Over 1000 rural women have been trained to provide technical support to this on-going and rapidly expanding program. The USAID-funded activity has trained 15,000 women and young people on the advantages, use and maintenance of renewable energy resources. The Ambassador observed a training program for women users of solar home systems, and exchanged views on the benefits of solar energy and the usefulness of the training led by women engineers at the technology center. The Ambassador observed women entrepreneurs trained at the center use their newly acquired skills to assemble solar home system components through which they earn about \$80 per month, locally considered a good wage. Grameen Shakti plans to continue training women technicians with a target of 100,000 over the next five years. In addition, they aim to install one million solar home systems by 2015.

BANGLADESH'S SHRIMP FARMS IMPROVE THEIR PRODUCTIVITY UNDER CAARP

¶9. Shrimp exports are the second largest revenue earner in Bangladesh, after textiles. The shrimp industry was badly decimated as a result of Cyclone Sidr in November 2007, when shrimp farms in southern Bangladesh were nearly totally destroyed by the storm. USAID's Cyclone Affected Aquaculture Rehabilitation Project (CAARP) is designed to re-establish and enhance the productive capacity of fish resources in the south and southeast of the country, thus contributing to the livelihoods of poor families in rural areas.

¶10. The Embassy team visited the Niribili shrimp hatchery in Cox's Bazaar, supported by a USAID World Fish Center project. The shrimp hatchery is part of a program to improve the quality and quantity of Bangladesh's shrimp for the export market in socially

and environmentally acceptable ways. Shrimp post-larvae are the most important input for producing and raising the yield and quality of shrimp sold to farmers, who then raise the shrimp to full size before export.

¶11. The Niribili hatchery is an industry pioneer in terms of improved productivity and quality. The Niribili hatchery, with US support, has developed and expanded its business network from the southeast of Bangladesh to the southwest where the shrimp farmers are concentrated. A commitment to quality has helped shrimp farmers grow shrimp with a substantially reduced incidence of disease. Hatcheries like Niribili are part of the local shrimp production chain leading to annual shrimp exports of \$455 million.

¶12. In addition to seeing shrimp larvae raised from eggs, the Embassy team also visited the USAID-developed Pranti laboratory in CoxQs Bazaar, responsible for testing shrimp larvae for disease. The future of the shrimp industry here depends on quality control, and this state of the art laboratory will help Bangladesh increase the quantity and quality of their shrimp. We observed shrimp being screened for various viruses which can infect and wipe out a shrimp farmerQs entire crop, resulting in huge losses and financial ruin. After being screened, shrimp larvae are available for sale to shrimp farmers who are assured that the larvae are healthy and will not infect the rest of their crop.

RURAL ELECTRIC POWER ON THE US COOPERATIVE MODEL

¶13. Energy shortage is a major impediment to economic growth in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas. The Increased Capacity for Energy Access project of USAID is designed to improve the management of rural electric cooperatives and to strengthen the local governance over the electricity sector. USAIDQs prime implementing partner for this activity is the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) which is comprised of electric cooperatives in the US.

¶14. In CoxQs Bazar we visited a rural electric cooperative (known locally as a Pally Bidyut Shomity or PBS). This PBS, like the other 69 PBSs in Bangladesh, receives assistance from the U.S. Government through USAID to expand access to electricity in rural areas. The Ambassador met with the local PBS management and congratulated them for a well-managed cooperative. He also met with beneficiaries who were waiting for new connections and to pay bills. The Ambassador asked customers if they were satisfied with the electric cooperativeQs services. While customers were pleased with the service orientation of the PBS, they expressed dissatisfaction with the frequent disruption in the supply of electricity, a widespread problem in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas. The USG has supported rural electrification in Bangladesh since 1977, providing more than \$220 million since the programQs inception.

QUALITY MEDICAL SERVICES IN A POOR RURAL SETTING, COURTESY OF A US FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION, WITH USAID TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

¶15. The Memorial Christian Hospital at Malumghat, Chakaria, CoxQs Bazar, provides both outpatient and inpatient medical treatment and care to over 35,000 patients per year. The purpose of the visit was to observe the USAID supported obstetric fistula treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention activities implemented by EngenderHealth in partnership with this hospital. (Note: Fistula is a condition caused by prolonged labor that leads to a hole between the birth canal and the intestine, with the result that fecal matter and bodily fluids pass into the birth canal. Women with this condition are often abandoned by their husbands and ostracized because of their inability to have children and the foul smell). After a briefing on the fistula program and other hospital activities, the Ambassador and team members walked through different sections of the hospital including the fistula ward set up with USAID support.

¶16. Since July 2005, the hospital has repaired 72 fistula cases, sometimes involving complicated and multiple surgeries in individual cases, and has raised awareness of health workers and

key community members in the district on the causes, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of fistula cases. The program has effectively integrated fistula repair and rehabilitation services at the hospital and coordinated clinical and outreach programs. In addition, Memorial Christian Hospital offers primary health care, emergency care, labor and delivery care, gynecological, general surgery, orthopedics care, and outpatient care for people in the southern part of Chittagong district and in CoxQs Bazar district. The hospital treats an average of 32,000 outpatients and 3,500 inpatients annually, performs 1,200 surgical operations and approximately 1,000 deliveries annually.

¶17. The hospital is renowned for its dedication and commitment. The exceptional commitment of the staff in delivering health services to the community, key to the success of the fistula program, is very impressive. The staff at the hospital includes American surgeons who spend years in residence. Given the isolated venue of this hospital, this island of American medical excellence is a proud achievement. The USGQs partnership with this hospital has created a wonderful opportunity for poor women to access fistula and other medical services and permitted them to return to their normal lives.

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